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AUTHOR Boyd, Virlyn A.; Pettigrew, Nancy J.
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ABSTRACT

Since recent growth in enrollment in colleges of agriculture has been made up of an increasing proportion of students without a farm or rural background, colleges of agriculture should look at course offerings to see if they meet students' needs. To examine the attitudes of students with nonfarm backgrounds who were majoring in agriculture, a questionnaire on career orientations was given to 90 freshmen students and 106 seniors at Clemson University during 1975-76. Results showed that more seniors had lived on a farm most of their lives than freshmen. Comparing farm and city students' responses indicated a higher proportion of city students wished to continue education beyond the bachelor's degree. Both city and farm students had been most influenced by personal interest in selecting their majors, but city students listed job opportunities as the next most influential factor, while farm students listed personal job experience. As far as career potential, more than 80% of both farm and city students felt agriculture was a growing industry, but more city students saw in it a high potential for making money and for advancement opportunities. Further research might compare farm and city students' attitudes about agriculture with attitudes about other specific career choices. (RS)

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EFFECT OF FARM BACKGROUND ON ATTITUDES OF AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS AT CLEMSON UNIVERSITY[1]

Virlyn A. Boyd and Nancy J. Pettigrew[2]

Background:

The second half of the decade of the seventies has seen a marked increase in the enrollment in agricultural curricula in many colleges and universities in the U.S.[3] Possible reasons for this increase include such factors as an increasing concern for the environment and for conservation of our natural resources, an increasing awareness of the importance of the problem of world food supply, and an increasing interest in programs such as ornamental horticulture and veterinary medicine with a specialty in small animal care.

Whatever the reasons for the increase, the additional enrollment is reason for colleges of agriculture to examine their course offerings with a view toward making them more nearly meet the needs of their students. Traditionally, a large proportion of agricultural majors have had an on-farm or at least a rural background and courses have been structured with this in mind. However, the recent increases in enrollment have come at a time when an increasing proportion of agricultural students have neither a farm nor a rural background. This is reason for giving consideration to the need for restructuring courses to compensate for this non-agricultural background of today's agricultural students. The extent to which this restructuring of courses is needed or even desirable is a matter of conjecture at this point.

Source of Data

Data from a research project conducted at Clemson University during the school year 1975-76 provide an opportunity to examine the extent and degree to which this non-farm background of students majoring in agriculture constitute a problem. A questionnaire on career orientations was administered to 90 freshmen students majoring in agriculture during the fall semester and to 106 seniors during the spring semester of the school year 1975-76. Analysis of selected data from these questionnaires provides an opportunity to compare answers given by students with a farm background with those given by students with a non-farm background.

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[1]Paper presented at the Rural Sociology Section of the Annual Meeting of the Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists, Atlanta, Ga., February 6-9, 1977.

[2]Associate Professor and Agricultural Research Associate, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, Clemson University.

[3]For example, according to data supplied by the Director of Resident Instruction, undergraduate enrollment in the College of Agricultural Sciences at Clemson University increased by 91% from school year 1972-73 to 1976-1977.

One of the questions was stated as follows:

"Where have you lived most of your life?"

_____1. In a large city (10,000 or over)

_____2. In a small city (2,500 to 10,000)

_____3. Town or village (under 2,500)

_____4. In the country, but not on a farm

_____5. On a farm

A tabulation of the answers to this question is included in Table 1. Analysis of data indicates that as compared to the freshmen, a higher proportion of the senior students had lived on a farm most of their lives. Conversely 30.0 percent of the freshmen but only 19.8 percent of the seniors reported that they had lived most of their lives in a city of 10,000 or over.

For purposes of this paper, those students who indicated that they had lived on a farm most of their lives will be classified as having a farm background, and those students who indicated that they had lived in a city of 10,000 or over most of their lives will be considered as having a city background. The intermediate categories of (a) small city, (b) town or village, and (c) in the country but not on a farm will not be included.

Since a preliminary examination of the answers given by the freshmen and seniors revealed very minor differences, the remainder of the analysis will not treat the freshmen and seniors separately but will consist of a comparison of answers given by students (both freshmen and seniors) who have a "city" background with those with a "farm" background.

Table 1. Residential Background of Students Majoring in Agriculture at Clemson Univeristy, 1975-76.

Residential Background	Freshman		Seniors		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
City 10,000 or over	27	30.0	21	19.8	48	24.5
City 2,500 - 10,000	21	23.3	19	17.9	40	20.4
Town or Village	10	11.2	13	12.3	23	11.7
In Country but no on Farm	4	3.3	15	14.2	19	9.7
On a Farm	28	31.1	38	35.8	66	33.7
Total	90		106		196	

The following question was used to determine the level of the student's educational aspirations:

"If you could have as much formal education as you desired, which of the following would you do?"

_____1. Quit school right now

_____2. Complete a technical, business, or vocational program

_____3. Complete work for an associate degree

_____4. Complete work for a bachelors degree

_____5. Complete a program for a masters degree

_____6. Complete a program for a program for a professional degree (vet, law, etc.)

_____7. Complete a program for a doctroal degree

Answers given to this question are summarized in Table 2. A higher proportion of the "city" students expressed a desire to continue their education beyond the bachelor's degree.

Table 2. Educational Aspirations of Clemson University Agriculture Students by Farm or City Background, 1976

Educational Aspiration	Where Student Lived Most of Life			
	City		Farm	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Quit Now	--	--	2	3.0
Technical	--	--	--	--
Associates	--	--	1	1.5
Bachelors	13	27.1	22	33.3
Masters	13	27.1	17	25.8
Professional	12	25.0	13	19.7
Ph.D.	10	20.8	11	16.7
No Answer	--	--	--	--
N =	48		66	

Influence of Selected Persons or Factors on Choice of Major

In an attempt to determine the extent of influence of selected persons or factors on the students' choice of a major the following question was asked:

How influential have each of the following people and/or things been in helping you to choose your college major? (Circle one number for each of the following)

		Very Influential	Some Influence	Little Influence	No Influence
a.	Parents	4	3	2	1
b.	Friends	4	3	2	1
c.	High school counselor	4	3	2	1
d.	Vo Ag teacher	4	3	2	1
e.	Home Economics teacher	4	3	2	1
f.	Job opportunities in this field	4	3	2	1
g.	Demand for minorities in this field: (a) race (b) sex	4	3	2	1
h.	Personal interest in field	4	3	2	1
i.	Personal job experience	4	3	2	1
j.	By chance	4	3	2	1

Responses to this question are presented in Table 3.

Examination of the data in Table 3 reveals several interesting differences in the level of influence of selected individuals or on choice of major of students from a farm background as compared to those who had lived in a large city most of their lives. Over one out of three of the farm students but only one out of five of the city students reported that their parents had been very influential in their choice of a major. Conversely one-third of the city students but only one-fourth of the farm students majoring in agriculture reported that their parents had had little or no influence in their choice of a major.

Table 3. Degree of Influence of Selected People or Factors on Choice of Major of Clemson Students in Agriculture 1976 by Farm or City Background of Students

People or Factors and Degree of Influence	Students by Background			
	City		Farm	
Parents	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Little or No Influence	16	33.3	16	24.2
Some Influence	22	45.8	25	37.9
Very Influential	10	20.9	25	37.9
Friends				
Little or No Influence	37	77.1	41	62.1
Some Influence	9	18.7	16	24.3
Very Influential	2	4.2	9	13.6
High School Counselor				
Little or No Influence	44	91.7	55	83.3
Some Influence	3	6.2	5	7.6
Very Influential	1	2.1	6	9.1
Vo-Ag Teacher				
Little or No Influence	40	83.3	40	60.6
Some Influence	--	--	10	15.2
Very Influential	2	4.2	14	21.2
No Answer	6	12.5	2	3.0
Job Opportunities				
Little or No Influence	13	27.1	7	10.6
Some Influence	13	27.1	25	37.9
Very Influence	22	45.8	34	51.5
Sex of Student				
Little or No Influence	45	93.7	58	87.9
Some Influence	1	2.1	2	3.0
Very Influential	--	--	--	--
No Answer	2	4.2	6	9.1
Personal Interest				
Little or No Influence	1	2.1	--	--
Some Influence	3	6.2	7	10.6
Very Influential	44	91.7	59	89.4
Personal Job Experience				
Little or No Influence	23	47.9	4	6.1
Some Influence	12	25.0	26	39.4
Very Influential	13	27.1	36	54.5
College Professor*				
Little or No Influence	10	47.6	23	60.5
Some Influence	7	33.3	12	31.6
Very Influential	4	19.0	3	7.9
College Course*				
Little or No Influence	7	33.3	11	28.9
Some Influence	6	28.6	16	42.2
Very Influential	8	38.1	11	28.9

*Includes responses of Seniors only.

High school counselors were not reported as being very influential by either group. This is in accord with the long held suspicion that high school counselors are either not aware of the opportunities in the field of agriculture or they are not prone to advise students in this direction.

It is not surprising that Vo Ag teachers were listed as very influential by 21 percent of the farm students but only 4.2% of the city students. Fewer and fewer students in both urban and rural schools have the opportunity to take Vo Ag in high school.

Job opportunities were listed as being very influential by more of the farm students than the city students. Students who grew up on a farm would quite likely have more personal knowledge of job opportunities in agriculture than would those who grew up in a city.

Personal interest was rated as very influential by a high proportion of students of both groups.

Personal job experience was ranked as very influential by over half of the farm studenents but only one-fourth of the city students. It is probable that more of the farm students had had opportunities for job experience related to agriculture.

As might be expected, both college courses and college professors were considered to be very influential in the choice of a major by a higher proportion the city students than of the farm students. This group was composed of Senior students and many of them had changed to agriculture after beginning college in some other curriculum.

Prestige and Potential of Career Choice

Answers to a series of questions designed to determine attitudes of the students about the relative prestige and potential of agriculture compared to other career choices are summarized in Table 4. A slightly higher proportion of the city students considered agriculture to have relatively high prestige. As compared to the farm students, a higher proportion of city students considered agriculture to offer a high potential for making money. Over eighty percent of both farm and city students felt that agriculture is a growing industry. Opportunities for advancement in agriculture were received more optimistically by city students than by farm students.

Limitations and Implications

In an analysis of this type, it should be remembered that the proportion of the total population living on farms is declining and therefore, it is not surprising that a smaller proportion of students in agriculture have a farm background. Also it should be remembered that there is little if any firm evidence that lack of a farm background is a deterrent to either being successful as a college student in agriculture or in having a successful career

Table 4. Attitudes about Prestige and Potential of Career Choice of Clemson University Students Majoring in Agriculture by Farm or City Background, 1975-76

Social Standing of Career Choice	Students by Background			
	City		Farm	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
High Prestige	12	25.0	15	22.7
Average Prestige	33	68.8	50	75.8
Low Prestige	3	6.2	1	1.5
Potential for Making Money				
High	23	47.9	22	33.3
Medium	23	47.9	42	63.6
Low	2	4.2	2	3.1
Feelings About Career				
Growing industry	40	83.3	53	80.3
Neither growing nor declining	7	14.6	9	13.6
Declining industry	1	2.1	4	6.1
Understanding of Opportunities				
Good understanding	21	43.8	34	51.5
Some understanding	19	39.5	31	47.0
Little or no understanding	7	14.6	1	1.5
No answer	1	2.1		
Opportunities for Advancement				
More than other fields	17	35.4	15	22.7
Same as other fields	27	56.3	46	69.7
Less than other fields	3	6.2	5	7.6
No answer	1	2.1		

in some phase of agriculture or agribusiness. Also, it might be helpful to compare attitudes of farm and city students about agriculture with attitudes about other specific career choices.